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Subject: The Apostolic Theory of Preaching.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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ANY BACK NUMBERS CAN BE FURNISHED

THE

APOSTOLIC THEORY OF PREACHING.

SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 30, 1869.

"SOME indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the Gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."—PHIL. i. 15-18.

IN such a sentence as this, every word, almost, is emphatic. There is one, however, that may be lifted up into prominence, perhaps, more fully: "What then? notwithstanding, every way." *Whatever be the way in which a man preaches*—that is the meaning of it—*whatever sort of preaching Christ it is, I rejoice in it.*

Consider this case. Paul lay in captivity. Faithful friends and adherents he had, who generously sought by their diligence in preaching to make up the loss of his service. They loved him, loved the Master, loved the work of the Gospel. But there were other preachers; and the epithets applied to them leave us little to respect in them. They were envious, combative, contentious, insincere, malignant; for what else than that is it to preach "hoping to add affliction to my bonds"? What sympathy had a man with Christ who sought to make the imprisonment of his chief apostle more burdensome by the exquisite torture of preaching Christ in such a way that the persecution against a doctrine should fall back upon the head of the apostle?

Take notice of Paul's way of looking at these things. When he declares, "What then? notwithstanding" they preach from envy, and from strife, and from contention, and from hoping to make my captivity worse; "notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice," it is very plain that these men who were using the Gospel of

Christ as a weapon of personal malignity were not ordained nor apostolical preachers. And yet, Paul found much cause of joy in their preaching. Bad as their spirit was, and imperfect as the preaching of Christ must always be in the case of unrenewed and unspiritual men, it was cause of joy rather than of sorrow to him. Paul's example, therefore, is eminent. It is a rebuke to the excessive ecclesiastical spirit. Paul saw something good in the worst men who preached. Modern precisionists see the worst in the best men. Paul looked on the good side. Modern orthodoxy is disposed always to look on the bad side. If a vase was cracked, Paul turned it round, and looked upon the side where it was not cracked. If a vase is cracked, we are disposed to turn it round, and look on the side where the crack comes. Paul would certainly rather have men preach Christ that loved Christ; but rather than that Christ should not be preached, he was willing that those who did not love him should preach. Paul desired that men who lived in sympathy with him and the church should preach Christ; but rather than that Christ should not be preached, he was willing that men who were at enmity with the one and the other should preach Christ. He was willing that men who had not been apostolically ordained should preach, rather than that there should not be any preaching. But stickling pretenders to his place would shut up all who had not had regular hands laid on regular heads, rather than that their preaching should not be canonical and right. This certainly is not apostolicity.

But what was it that led Paul to find reasons of joy even in his bitter enemies? It was that *Christ was preached*. That fact, in its poorest method, was so transcendent that it was of intensely more importance than the incidental errors and imperfections and wrongs. The rising sun in the morning brings ten thousand noxious insects to life, brings miasma from the morass, and sets disease flying through the land; nevertheless, in spite of malaria, and in spite of all venomous insects that then begin to move, and in spite of all mischiefs which waking men begin to perform, it is infinitely better that the sun should rise, and that these evils should take place, than that it should be everlastingly dark. It was better to have Christ preached by bad men than not at all. It was better to have the Gospel imperfectly delivered than not to have it made known in any way, or only to a limited extent. The truth preached with manifold and manifest error is a thousand times better than none at all.

While the full and symmetrical truth as it is in Jesus will do far more good, and good of a far higher type, than any fragmentary view, yet such is the vitality and power of Christian truth that its very fragments are potent for good. It is scarcely possible to preach the

Gospel so poorly that it is not far better than not to have it preached at all.

If modern thought be correct, this is a strange doctrine to be found in the Bible; but it is a legitimate inference from Paul's example.

Consider the sweetness of Paul's soul. On him rested Christ's work among the Gentiles. He was a sufferer for the cause of Christ. He had laid the foundation of Christian institutions. The churches were identified with his name, as well as with Christ's. And these men, in Paul's captivity, preached Christ only for the purpose of destroying Paul, and destroying his work. But the personal irritation, the pride, of the pastorate, the intolerable itch of heresy-hunting, found no place in Paul's mind. The conduct of these men gave him occasion for joy. "I rejoice; yea, and I *will* rejoice." There you have it—the voice, and the echo; the impulse, and the after-thought. His joy was this: "Bad as men are, imperfect as their mission is, erroneous as much of their teaching must be, still there is something of Christ's truth there; and so precious is the truth of Christ, so vital and powerful is it even in its very fragments, that I rejoice, in spite of all these things, that they are preaching it."

Consider what a testimony this is to the power of Christian truth. It is so divine that the smallest part of it is radiant of heavenly light. One may stand before an ample glass, long and broad, which reflects the whole figure, and the whole room, giving every part in proportion and in relation. Break that mirror into a thousand fragments, and each one of these pieces will give back to you your face; and though the amplitude of view and the relations of objects are gone, yet the smallest fragment, in its nature and uses, is a mirror still, and you can see your face withal.

A full Christ reflects men, time, and immortality; but let error shatter the celestial glass, and its fragments, reduced in value, do in part some of that work which the whole did; and they are precious. The whole Christ, very God, yet incarnate, and now ever-living, the head over all with the Father and the Holy Ghost, is that pure mirror; but break it—let some preach Christ as human; and some as divine, but not as Deity; and some as the only God, without Father or Spirit; and some as the Father alone—and imperfect as these varying ways may be, it is impossible but that good shall be done by them. For, although they do not contain the whole truth, they contain something of the truth. Much as we may regret their imperfection, it is ours to rejoice that there is as much as there is even in the most imperfect, and limited, and rude representations of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

If I have given the right interpretation of the apostle's spirit, there hang upon it some weighty inferences.

1. We here see the *true ground of Christian toleration*. It is not an enforced forbearance with men who teach error. Some men keep their hands off from errorists because the law will not let them touch them. They would burn them if they could, but they do not dare; and that they call *toleration*! That is the same kind of self-denial which boys practice when the fruit hangs ripe and tempting in the garden, and they will not touch it because the stone wall is so very high that they can not climb over. There are men who think they tolerate error because they can not get at it. They can not burn nor silence the heresiarch, and so they dignify their impossibilities with the name of *toleration*.

It is not, either, a recognition of the right of men to freedom of thought and experience. Each man has the same right to form an independent opinion, and to act according to his convictions, that we have; and we are bound to respect that right in others which we ourselves exercise; but this is only a part of the duty of toleration.

Still less is Christian toleration indifference to error or to truth. How many men there are who laugh at the quarreling of churches, and say, "Oh! you ought to exercise the same toleration which we feel!" There are men who do not care whether you teach God or Jupiter; who do not care whether it is Greek mythology, or Roman mythology, or Christian theology that you teach; who are profoundly indifferent to any thing and every thing; and they call that toleration. It is *not* toleration. True Christian toleration is a generous confidence in the vitality of the truth. It is the immovable conviction of a man's mind that even in its most imperfect form truth carries divine benefit with it; and that it is strong enough, if you give it a fair chance to make its own way, to purge itself from the error that is generated with it in its original inceptions. True toleration is confidence in truth, and in the God of truth. It is the belief that God has so ordered nature and society and Christian institutions that, if there be freedom given, truth will vindicate its superiority over all cunning forms and combinations of error. It is a large and catholic confidence not only in the essential verity of truth, but in the essential *victory* of truth. It is only another name, therefore, for faith in the truth of God. It is born of hope, nursed by courage, and adopted by love. As Moses was adopted by the king's daughter, so is toleration by love. Its prevalence will not be the letting down of barriers, but will rather be the building up of health.

There is some truth in all error. That truth will work sovereignly, and spread, healing evil, if only it be not malignantly buffeted. It is persecution that makes error dangerous. The tolerance

of Christian love and faith will speedily cure evil. Love is the medicine of all moral evil. By it the world is to be cured of sin. Love saved the world; and when, in the consummation of all things, sin and death shall die, and joy and purity shall be universal, then love shall sit regent, *king of kings, and lord of lords*. It is this spirit that enters into true toleration.

Paul, lying in bonds, sensitive to the last degree to his own reputation, sensitive to the good name of his Master, and to the success of the cause, beheld rampant and ravening men taking his doctrine for a mere pretense, and preaching it, and preaching it as crudely and rudely as truth could be preached; and how natural it would have been for him to have taken offense, and to have cried, "Silence, *silence* the mischievous men! Put them down!" But no. He said, "Let them go on; let them go on: I rejoice in it; yea, and I *will* rejoice to the end." For, in spite of their bad motives, and in spite of their bad handling, there is something of Christ, after all, that will be preached by these men that otherwise would not have got out. And the least particle, the smallest fragment, of truth, is so unspeakably precious that it is worth while to wade through ten thousand times its bulk in error, for the sake of getting at it.

2. If Paul's spirit is right, then we need to amend our view of social and moral responsibility. He saw bad men taking his place, and preaching to his disciples; and yet he held his peace, so far as they were concerned. He let them go on. He rejoiced in their work, though not in the motive of it. Had he lived in our day, he would have been taught a different doctrine. He would have been told, "Unless you, by public and open protest, cleanse your skirts from these men, you are responsible for what they teach. You must not go with men that hold to error. If you do, you are responsible for that error." He would have been told, as many are told, "You can not afford to sit in a church where there are great errors taught. You are responsible for those errors unless you separate yourselves from the men who hold to them and teach them." And he would have been asked at the communion of our Lord, "How can you sit down and commune with men that you know are godless and wicked? Do not you take upon you the responsibility of the conduct and errors of men that are heretical, or even immoral, if you are seen sitting side by side with them at the Lord's table?"

Paul would have replied, "Who made you the judge of another man's servant? and who made me the judge of another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." Every man was born into the world alone, and every man will die out of the world alone; and every man that comes into the world or goes out of the world stands, in a certain sense, responsible to God for his conduct

or belief. I am not, therefore, responsible for what other men do. If I please to work with men that are heretical in every point of theology, but that are not heretical, that is, who are right in the point in which I work with them, I am not responsible for their wrong beliefs. I am responsible for that part which I take, but not for the other parts which they take. They are responsible for them.

It is supposed, for example, that if Theodore Parker—who was not believed to be the *most* orthodox man that ever preached—had gone into a campaign of temperance, and I had appeared on the platform with him, and worked, as the expression is, “hand and glove” with him, I would have been at fault. Men would have said, “How can you, a Christian minister, (*reasonably* orthodox,) afford to go on the platform with a man who is notoriously heretical? Do not you give your influence to him? and do not you take a part of the responsibility of that man’s errors, unless you protest against them?” No! I say that if the platform on which I stood with him had been temperance, and if that platform had been a good one, I should have been justified, so far as standing there was concerned, and I should not have been responsible for any thing beyond that. I should not have stood with him there on the doctrine of the Trinity, nor on the doctrine of depravity, nor on the doctrine of regeneration by the power of the Holy Ghost, nor on the doctrine of church organization. It would have been simply the practical question of saving men from the demon of intemperance. I should have stood with him on that ground, and should not have been responsible for the other things in which he believed.

Shall a man say, in the heat of battle, as at Gettysburg, to the man by his side, “Before I fight with you any longer, I must know what your notions are about the creed”? Is he responsible for what that man believes? There is one thing on which they are agreed, and that is patriotism; and being agreed on that, let them work together for patriotic ends. Because I work with a man in a thing about which he and I are agreed, I am not responsible for the other things about which we are not agreed.

Paul, in some sense, praised these men. He was grieved at the great amount of error that there was in them; but the small amount of truth which he saw pleased him more than all the error displeased him. His was one of those sweet, manly minds, that saw the positive, the noble, the good, and ran for that, and turned away from the evil, unwilling to look at that. He was not a morbid anatomist. I can imagine surgeons so in love with their business that, whenever they meet a man, they look upon him and say, “He looks well enough; but I will warrant that, if I had him on the table, I could find that he was ruptured somewhere. He appears all right; but if I

could only get at him, I could find defects enough in him." There are men that like to eat; that like to hunt; that like to smell rottenness afar off; that like disease, and morbid conditions; that gloat over these things.

You recollect that, in one of Walter Scott's stories, one of the characters is a surgeon, who is always tittering and laughing at every pain he produces. When, for instance, he is performing the operation of taking out an arrow, and the man winces, he laughs, and says, "Does it hurt you?" And as he salves it, and binds it up, every twinge of pain makes him laugh!

I have seen no such example as that in dealing with men's bodies, but I have seen that which was almost parallel to it in dealing with men's souls, and with their errors. I have seen persons that looked on a man only to see where the sores were, and handled a man only to hit the nerves and make him wince, and laughed and seemed to rejoice in the morbid conditions that they were exposing. I have seen men that, every Sunday, wallowed knee-deep in human rottenness, and seemed to delight in it. Their calling, apparently, was to preach about sin, sin, sin. They were continually finding fault on the right and on the left, on the north and on the south. I have seen men that took pleasure in nothing so much as "showing up" a doctrine, or showing up a church. Is that the Pauline spirit? Is that the Christian spirit? Is that the manly spirit?

Suppose it should be said that every man who goes to the Fifth Avenue Hotel was responsible for every family in that hotel. If he behaves himself at the table, and behaves himself in his own room, and behaves himself in his going out and coming in, would it be fair to hold him responsible for the whole congeries of families there? And would it be fair to make any one family in this church responsible for the good or bad conduct of all the other families, or any other family, in it? We are not so organized and affiliated that we can control each other, and therefore we are not responsible one for another. What if it should be held that in a school each scholar was responsible for the student character of every other scholar? There is no such doctrine of responsibility. Each boy stands on his own feet. As the saying is, "Every tub stands on its own bottom." And as it is in school regulations, so it is in church fellowship. I am responsible for the doctrines that I preach here; but if another man comes into my pulpit and preaches a heretical doctrine, he is responsible—not I. "Ah! but!" it is said, "people will understand it differently." Then that is a reason why they should be taught better. It is not a reason why I should lose my liberty, but it is a reason why I should teach them to see things in a larger light.

This difficulty, which blinds the conscience of many men, is really

in the way of Christian unity. There are many persons of tender consciences, many persons of unenlightened consciences, and many persons of educated and miseducated consciences, who hold that it is a part of their fealty to Christ, not only to be pure in their morals, and to purely hold that system of truth which has been taught them, but to be in some sense responsible for those who are in other denominations. Therefore, when they are called to fellowship and unity and coöperation, it is with exceeding fear and hesitation that they approach the subject. "It is," they say, "letting down the bars through which all manner of errors shall come into the church; and it is the duty of every well-informed and rigorous-conscienced man to see to it that no harm shall be done to the church by his carelessness or ill-timed sympathy."

If this doctrine of responsibility is true, I do not see how we are ever going to come together in Christian sympathy and coöperation and liberty. If I am responsible for every body that I talk with, and walk with, and work with, and coöperate with generally, I shall retreat from one and another, and become less and less coöperative, until at last I shall stand absolutely by myself. Is that the spirit of Christ? It is a narrowing, belittling spirit. Nay, verily, Paul is a better exponent. Even the worst case that you could imagine gave him joy in his heart. He went out with these bad men that preached the Gospel for even a malicious purpose, and he said, "I rejoice in it;" and he did not consider himself responsible for their conduct, either.

3. This Christian toleration, founded in faith and love, leads to the real and the only union possible to the Christian church. There never will be a union in the Christian church until the time comes when men feel that the interior, invisible, spiritual substance of religion is transcendently of more importance than its external formulas, whether of belief or discipline. These are not unimportant, by any means; but there never will be Christian union in this world until men come to feel that the invisible, spiritual elements of truth, the interior experiences of the soul, are transcendently more important than the idea forms, or the government forms, or the worship forms of the church. It is impossible to secure unity by the spirit of organization, of government, or of ceremony. These are not only external, material, of the earth earthy, but they are of man's device. They are not the less useful, perhaps, on that account. I do not consider that if the mowing-machine had been invented by St. Peter, and had come down to us, without change, perfect, it would have been any better than it is now, after having originated in man's wit and device, and come down through successive improvements to its present condition and perfectness. When a thing is good, it is good without reference to where it comes from. A truth is not a bit truer

when God speaks it, than when a man speaks it. When a truth is spoken to you which you are doubtful about, if God speaks it, the presumptive evidence of it is greater than if a man speaks it. But a truth which is no longer disputed, which is admitted to be true, is just as true if a man first spoke it, as it would be if an angel first spoke it. The evidence of truth is in itself, after it has once been ascertained.

And so it is with all institutions. If a church had been framed in an apostolic age, perfect in every line and lineament, it would have been no better than a church which has been framed and perfected as the result of the experience of two thousand years, and that fully answers the ends of a church. It is by the fruit that you are to judge.

I do not say that a church is better because all its government is human—but all church governments are human; or because all its worship is human—but all forms of worship are pure human inventions; or because all its organization is human—but it *is* human. There is not a single line or letter of the Bible that establishes pope—and to that you will all say, “I believe you;” nor cardinal—you will all say, “I believe you;” nor bishop—nine tenths of you will say, “I believe you;” and the other tenth will say, “Well, I do not like to go too far in that direction;” nor presbyter—a good many of you will say, “There is evidence of that.” I say there is evidence in this: that every man who is called of the Lord Jesus Christ, and has the gifts of preaching, has a right to preach. Your preacher is a man that is carved out by men’s hands—that is ordained by certain outward ceremonies; but an externally ordained man has no warrant in Scripture. Any man that has the love of Jesus, and the power to preach the love of Jesus, is the New Testament preacher, but not the ecclesiastical preacher—not the preacher of the church that bears the name of Christ.

I hold that bishops are all well enough. I do not object to bishops. I dare say I should like to be a bishop myself! I do not object to a pope. His place is eminently desirable; and I do not suppose there is a man in this congregation who would not be a pope if he could. It is not a pope that we object to, but it is *the Pope in Rome*. We do not object to the pope that lives in us. Every man has a pope in him. There are in the family hundreds of popes, male and female. Wherever men can have power over others, and they exercise it, and love it, they are pope. And I do not object particularly to any church that chooses to organize itself with a pope, and cardinals, and bishops, and priests, and ministers, provided it says that neither of them is of such divine ordination as to be obligatory on the whole church. If they merely say, “Experience has taught us that this kind of organization, this method of preparing ministers and governors in

the church is a good one, and leads to the accomplishment of a good work, and we prefer it," I have no more to say. It is their liberty, and I respect that liberty. I might not like to conform to such a method, but I have no objection to it. When, however, they attempt to impose it on me; when they say to me, "You must do so and so;" when they say, "Unless the church in which your worship is thus and thus organized, and has just such an order of men, it is not a Christian church;" when they look benevolently down upon me from their human-built walls, and say, "You *may* be saved out of your church; don't know; it is possible; God is very merciful, but it is an uncovenanted mercy; you'll have to take your chance: we up here are going to be saved; but you down there, that live irregularly—can't make you any promises; you'd better come in here, and be safe—" when men take this way with me, I am even wickeder than they are. I have more contempt for them than they have for me. They must not attempt to force their human-made institutions upon me. If they say they are good, and take them of their own free choice because experience has shown that they are good, that is fair and rational. I make no objection to that. But where they undertake to say that it is the only thing whereby a man shall be saved, I lift up my heart and my Christ against them, and say, "My salvation comes, not through this medium or that, but from God's great love to my soul through Jesus Christ, and I am safe, though all the ocean should lift against me its mighty waves, and storms embattled should sweep the heavens. 'If God be for me, who can be against me?' I stand in the verity of this simple power of God's heart on my heart. That saves me." And if they say, "You have gifts for preaching, and you might have been a tolerable preacher if you had been properly ordained," I reply that I *was* properly ordained. My father ordained me. Ah! I was better ordained than that: my greater Father ordained me. He ordained me twice: first, when he put his hand on my head before I was born, and said, "Be a head;" and then, after I had carried it around a few years, when he stretched out his hand and touched my heart rather than my head, and said, "Be ordained again." First, he makes the head-piece, to think; and then he touches the heart, and says, "Go preach my Gospel." When a man has had that done to him, he is ordained. A pope could not make him any better; a bishop could not make him any better; a whole presbytery could not make him any better. Yet, if a man says, "I should feel better if I only thought that this bishop had been touched by that bishop, and that bishop by that bishop, and that bishop by that bishop, and that bishop by that bishop, clear back to the apostolic battery, and that finally a little spark had come down on me," then that is his liberty. Let him by all means take the shock! I have no objection to it. It

is a free country, not only, but it is a free ecclesiastical economy. You have perfect liberty to take whatever you think will make you feel better. If this mode of ordination addresses itself to your sentiment, to your poetical instincts, or even to your affections—which is the last thing that I can imagine—and if you want it, that is the reason why you should be at liberty to take it. It is not this that I object to in high churches. It is their domination, it is their arrogance; it is their despotism; it is their declaration that *they are the people*, and that *wisdom shall die with them*; it is their assumption that there is but one order, and that that is in their church. I hold that every man who knows Christ Jesus, and loves Him, and loves his fellow-men, not only has a right to preach what he is, and what Christ has done for him, and what life, and life eternal, is, but has a right, if he chooses, to gather those to whom he preaches into a brotherhood, and call them a church; and if he chooses to dispense the bread and wine to them, that is the communion of the Lord's Supper. Though never priest saw him, nor minister touched him, he is ordained, and is authorized to administer the sacrament.

Oh! that those men who are so fond of finding the apostles could only find the inside as well as the outside. What they seem to seek is the apostles' old coats, their old linen, their cast-off garments—not that glowing soul of catholicity, not that large element of true and manly love, not that broad sense of liberty, not that intense feeling of personal independence, which was in Paul, and which was in the Master before him.

The sooner it is understood that churches and sects are just what States are in this government, the better it will be. A man is born in Connecticut, and he thinks it is the best State in the Union—until he sees some other. And when he goes out of it, he does not forget his native State. He goes to New-York, and settles there; but does any body think of saying to him, "Turncoat! turncoat! born and brought up in Connecticut, and left it, and gone to live in another State with an entirely different organization"? By and by, on a land speculation, he moves to Michigan; but is it said of him, "Capricious fellow! always changing his State; born in Connecticut, lived in New-York, and now settled in Michigan"? What if he goes next to Illinois, and then to Mississippi, and then to Georgia, and then to the Carolinas, and to Old Virginia, does any body charge him with recreancy? He may think that some one of these States is better than any other, and yet be a true patriot. It is a part of our civic liberty, that a citizen of one State is a citizen of every State. And it ought to be so in church organization. Here are the Methodists, the Baptists, the Lutherans, the Presbyterians of different shades, the Episcopals, and the different shades of Catholics, (for the Catholic

Church is like a chestnut burr: the burr is one, but there are two nuts, and sometimes three, inside of it!)—here are all these various denominations or sects; and I hold that a person ought to feel about them as he does about States or towns. If you are in a place where the Episcopal church is the one that gives you the most food, do not hesitate to go into that church. There is no inconsistency in such a course. Or, going from that place to another, is it a Presbyterian church that is best calculated to do you good? You are perhaps a red-hot Congregationalist; but you need not on that account hesitate to go into a Presbyterian church. If you find that there God's ministrations best fit you, go there. These are externalities. They are matters of perfect indifference, so far as consistency is concerned.

I hold that there is a preference among governments; but I also hold that the poorest government so far answers the end of government, that a man can stand in it; and that, however different governments are, one from another, a man is not inconsistent that passes from one to the other. And as it is with governments, so it ought to be with churches. There ought to be a door so wide between sects, that when a man is with Methodists, he can be a Methodist; and when he is with Baptists, he can be a Baptist; and when he is with Presbyterians, he can be a Presbyterian; and when he is with Episcopalians, he can be an Episcopalian; and when he is with Congregationalists, he can be a Congregationalist.

Why, I keep house my way—*our* way! It is the best way, undoubtedly. I think so, at any rate. If I did not, I should change it. My next-door neighbor keeps house differently. I go to see him, and take breakfast or dinner with him; but I do not think it polite for me to point out to him how inferior I consider his way to mine. And I do not think it inconsistent for me to spend days very pleasantly at a friend's house, though his notions of housekeeping are different from mine. I say to myself, "These variations in housekeeping are quite consistent with neighborhood unity." Some men breakfast at six in the morning—blessings on such folks; others breakfast at eight; others at nine; and others at ten, (and still call it breakfast!) Some men prefer a certain dish fried; and others prefer it broiled. Some prefer much condiment. The caster is in great glory on their table. Others abhor vinegar and mustard, and all manner of catsups. Some prefer meats, and others a vegetable diet. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own"—*mouth!* Let every man have liberty in housekeeping. There is no harm in it.

As it is in regard to our most intimate domestic relationships, just so, precisely, will it be in religion, when the large Christian spirit, the spirit of love, is stronger than the spirit of sectarianism and division, and churches keep house as they please. We Congre-

gationalists, here, keep house as we please. Our Baptist brother, in the next street, keeps house as he pleases, differing from us only in the quantity of water that he uses. My neighbor Schenck, of St. Ann's, keeps house as he pleases. He has a large economy of house-keeping. He keeps house with more aspect, more show, more service and ceremony, than I am accustomed to. That suits him, and it does not unsuit me. And when I go there, I conform to it.

When I go to an Englishman's house, I say to myself, "In all things that do not affect moral principle, I am an Englishman so long as I stay under this roof." When I go to a man's house in France, I say, "In all things that do not touch principle, so long as I stay here I am a Frenchman." And I not only adapt myself to the customs of the household where I am, but I observe the laws of the country that I am in. I do not honor the laws of another land as I do the corresponding ones in my own land; but I respect them.

Now, what is the reason that persons have learned to have this tolerance of each other in the family and in the civil state, and have not yet learned the same royal and economic and wise lesson in ecclesiastical affairs? Why is it that men think it incumbent upon them to be cats and dogs in religion, and gentlemen in every thing outside of it?

I remember perfectly well when, if a New-School minister had gone into a church where an Old-School minister was preaching—or rather, that it may not be invidious, if an Old-School minister had gone into a church where a New-School minister was preaching, we (I belonged to the New School) should almost have thought it a part of fidelity to our cause to have given that man a "wipe" before he went out, to show him that we stood on our own ground! If a Methodist had been preaching, and he had seen a Calvinist in the house, he would have gone off in favor of free grace, and against the five points of Calvinism!

Suppose I should invite an Englishman to my house, and, as soon as he had taken his seat, should begin on him, and say, by way of entertaining him, "Do you, sir, think that a queen is as good as a president? Do not you think that a monarchy is about the meanest government on the face of the earth?" That which we would scorn to do in the family, that which we would consider a breach of politeness in the household, men are perpetually doing in churches and assemblies of Christian men; and in doing it they think they are serving God and obeying their own consciences!

Do you suppose there will ever be unity in the church until there is a different spirit? And when there is a different spirit, do you suppose church organizations are going to help or hinder? They are matters of indifference so far as unity is concerned; but they are

matters of universal joy and liberty; and they ought to be so free that a man can go among them all, having his own preferences and prepossessions, and yet respecting other people's liberties.

I hope the time will come when I can worship at the hands of a Roman priest and be edified, as I have worshiped at the hands of an English priest and bishop and been abundantly edified. I believe the time will come when the liberty and catholicity of all sects will be such that men will not be talking about abolishing denominations and sects. The idea is an absurdity. They never will be abolished. But the time will come, I believe, when a man will feel at home in them all, and when Christianity will be open and free to all alike. Then you will have Christian union.

I remark again, that it is impossible to secure any visible and external unity of Christians by doctrinal identity. I make this statement without prejudice to the importance of men's having right beliefs, and on all proper occasions, and in all proper methods, reducing those beliefs to right forms of statement. I believe in creeds; but I disbelieve in the despotism of creeds. Men who say, "The Bible is my creed," are very much like philosophers, that I can imagine. I am very much interested in the discussion that is going on about the origin of the human race. Charles Darwin's writings are full of profound matter. All those schools that are reasoning, are bringing up principles that no educated and well-informed man can, with self-respect, avoid considering. But suppose I were talking to a man, and should say to him, "What views do you hold on this subject of the origin of the human species?" and he should say, "The encyclopedia is my creed?" The encyclopedia, you know, is a book which contains, or purports to contain, every thing that belongs to the sum of human knowledge. And that is his creed! A man might just as well say, "I believe in the world, and all that it contains." But what do you believe it contains? That is the question. What do you believe about the generic origin, and the special developments, of things? Every age discusses such subjects. And it is absurd to say that you believe in *the Bible*. The Bible is an encyclopedia of moral knowledge. It epitomizes the results of the various ages down to the time of Christ. And the question is, "What are its contents? What does it teach?" To say that you believe in the whole of it, without being able to say what you believe particularly in it, is a miserable subterfuge. I hold that creeds are merely statements of the specialties of men's beliefs. And they are natural, not only, but a man without a creed is generally a man without a head. Every man believes, and disbelieves, in certain definite things; and if he should write those things down, he would have a written creed. And if he should get other men to agree with him,

he would have a common creed. But when men say that they believe *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*, and that men must take it just so, fitted to their notions, that is an abuse of a creed. A creed is a good thing to teach a congregation by, and to catechise children by. It is good to lay down general points of belief round which a congregation may gather. But a creed is not a whip of scorpions by which we are to lash each other's backs.

I go further. I believe that there will be a similarity of beliefs in the final sympathetic union toward which the church is moving; but I do not believe that men will hold the same philosophical creeds, all alike. I do not believe it is possible to bring churches together on any such ground. I do not think that the beliefs of men who are differently constituted can be symbolized by one single, definite form. For example, a man that has large reflective faculties and small perceptive faculties, will have a creed very different from that of a man who has large perceptive faculties and small reflective faculties. Here is a man that is a dry thinker. He has no social emotions, and no artistic feeling. The truth that he sees is truth as bare as granite. There is no flower on it, and no color in it. It is pure, high, dry, speculative truth. And that seems to him sweet and beautiful. It conforms to his organization. But his next neighbor is a man that is poetically endowed; and no truth seems beautiful to him that has not leaves and flowers. To his mind, that color which comes from feeling is an essential part of the statement of the truth itself. Therefore he never could take the symbol of the other man. They may hold the same great facts, but not in the same language—certainly not in the same technical and philosophical terms. A man that is a reasoner and factualist; a man that is eminently a matter-of-fact man; a dreamer; a seer; a sharp analyst; a man that looks up and around, and perceives the minutest objects—you can not bring all these men to the same form of statement, to the same symbolism; and the attempt to do it is an attempt to violate the economy of nature. God did not mean that it should be so.

I believe in the doctrine of man's sinfulness, and I state it in my way and language. I hear other men, who believe it just as much as I do, state it in their way. I can not take their statement, and they can not take mine; but why should we not go along side by side? Why should we insist upon fighting each other? Why should we not recognize each other's liberty? Why should I not state it as it seems to me, and leave him to state it as it seems to him? Take the question of God's grace in the soul. It looks to you one way; and to another man it looks another way; and you give your statement, and he gives his.

O sun! come from the winter to the spring, and let there be uni-

versal buds and flowers. In response to my prayer and supplication, the sun comes forth. And first I perceive the chick-weed blossoming, almost inconspicuous. It is born again of the sun, and shows the sun's power. Just beyond there is a clump of violets. They are born again out of death into life by the power of the sun. Further on are bulbs of various kinds. And each develops in its own way. One has one style of leaf or bloom, and another another. And they multiply as the sun grows warmer, till the woods and fields swarm with myriads of growths, some purple, some red, some white, some blue, some green, all shades and combinations and forms being represented. They are all born of the sun, and brought into their life and power; and yet they are widely different in their structure and appearance. Would you reduce them all to one, and have nothing but daisies, nothing but tulips, or nothing but violets? Are not God's abundant riches in this, that when he creates life from death in so many ways, there are presented such variations of beauty and amiableness?

So it is with the truths of the Gospel. God does not make those truths the same to any two minds. If men had the subtle power of analysis, so as to seize just what they feel, and put their feelings exactly into words, I believe it would be found that no two persons on the face of the earth ever stated, or could state, their views of a fact alike. God, that never made two faces alike; God, that never made two leaves alike; God, that makes unity with infinite diversity—he does not mean that men shall feel just alike. The amplitude of being is expressed by variations of being that go back to essential unity, and take hold of a common root. And the attempt to bring the glowing and fervid Orientals, the staid and practical Occidentals, the mediæval minds, the artist minds, the sombre and unirradiating natures, and the light and gay natures, all to one statement of speculative truth, is as wild and preposterous as the boy's race after the rainbow. It can not be done.

Hence, before we can have a unity of the church, we must have something better than external unity of organization, or internal unity of statement of doctrine.

This it is that is revealed in the passage which we have made the basis of our remarks this morning. Although it is not carried out with any fullness, we have there that which is to be the substantial element of every true Christian unity. It is not to be an outward one. It is to be an inward one. It is to be the spirit of true love one to another—love in spite of fault; love in spite of difference; love that has no regard whatever to any thing less than Christ and God.

Did you ever think that when Christ governs his church on earth he is like a husbandman who drives home to his barn his load of

wheat? How much of it is straw! How much, when he threshes it, is husk and chaff! How much, when he grinds it, is bran! For a ton that he drives home from the field, he will show you two hundred weight of wheat, perhaps. And when God takes this church, he takes it, straw and chaff and all. When he takes our neighboring churches, he takes them straw and chaff and all. And we must all rise so high into the spirit of the eternal God that we can take men, straw and chaff and all, and gather them with the many imperfections of the vehicles in which they grow.

When the time of unity comes, it will be a time when men will cease to make minute inquiries into the root, and straw, and husk, and bran. It will be a time when men shall feel toward each other, "Thou lovest Christ, and Christ loves thee; and that is the only bond that is needful." *Love to God and man is the fulfilling of the law.* Who are ye that dare impose more than this as a ground of coöperation and unity? He that is ever so orthodox, if he does not love, is a heretic; and the greatest heretic, if he loves God and loves man is orthodox. For orthodoxy is of the heart. The head is but the servant, the implement. And when we can come together as churches; when all Christians, in all Christendom, understand the evidence of truth to lie in the fruit of the truth; when gentleness, and meekness, and humility, and love prevail among men; when there is fervent and self-denying worship toward God, these things ought to be considered enough for substantial unity. Unity is of the heart, not of the body. Unity is not in government nor in creeds, but in faith, and hope, and love: the greatest of which is Love.

Wherefore, let us close with the words of the apostle, "Till we all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." There is the model union. It is expressed in the term *Christian manhood*.

God grant, in this day, when rent churches are coming together, that all kind auspices may rest upon the restored union. When churches are reaching out hands that are not accepted, as between the Methodists North and the Methodists South—when churches are seeking union, and yet refusing to clasp hands—God bring again more than the old love, and restore them to unity. Let churches, if they will, seek to make themselves national; but do not augur too hopefully. Churches are not strong in proportion as they are geographically united. If it is better in the esteem of those who have the management of these things that the churches should be so united, let them labor for that consummation; but the power of the Gospel is not to be estimated by arithmetical ratio. It does not lie in the number of church rolls. It is not the number of presby-

teries or the number of synods that is going to test the power of Christ. Unquenchable zeal and love are going to give power to the church—not these external things.

When the bishops of the Episcopal Church in England send greetings to their brethren the bishops of the Episcopal Church in America, and invite them to go over and confer with them, that there may be a Pan-Anglican Church, let them go. The voyage is pleasant, the meetings are pleasant, and some good may come out of it. But you must not expect too much. You can not do a great deal by these externalities. If these bishops come back to America humbler than they went, and with a more profound sense of the value of souls, and a clearer conception of the brotherhood of men, that part of their Pan-Anglicanism will do good. But the external features of it are of but little consequence.

When the mild and summery old Pope sends his missive to Presbyterians and Episcopalians, and says, "Brethren, wandering in irregular paths, behold! we have called an ecumenical council: come all, that a universal Christendom may be represented in this council:" I say to the Pope, "God bless you, dear old man; and God bless your bishops, and make them a hundred times holier than they are; and God bless all the churches that are under your authority according to the arrangements of men. If it were convenient for me to go to Rome, and I could throw any light on the liberty of the individual, I would sit in your council. But it matters very little to me whether I go or stay. For the church is not with you. You do not own Christ, and you do not own the world. Grace be unto you, because you are a part of God's flock, with all your faults. Grace be unto you in all your endeavors. However imperfectly your priests and bishops may preach; however much they may have brought down from a mediæval age of luggage on their backs, nevertheless, I will rejoice because, anyhow, Christ is preached."

I would not put out the Catholic Church if I could. If God were to give me the power to destroy all the churches that exist, saying, "You have only to speak to sweep them from the face of the earth," I don't know of one that I would annihilate. I say, further than that, I am so firmly convinced of the divine economy of divisions, of various organizations, in the church, that if power were put into my hands, and I were told by the Almighty, "If you but speak the word, all churches shall be identified, and there shall not be a single sect on the globe," I would not speak it. I would say, Let the churches stand as they are, so far as mere organization is concerned. They came together by elective affinity; and each has hidden in its bosom some great element that perhaps none of the others have. So vast is the truth, that it is not given to any man or set of men to tell the

whole of it. It takes one part to tell one side; another part to tell another side; another part to tell another side; and still another part to tell another side. And then the whole is not unfolded. Ages to come must correct past ages, and add to this anthem that discloses all manner of divine love and divine grace. All I would do, if God gave me the power, would be to hold my hand out over the scattered sects in Christendom, that make the one church, and say, *Love one another, and so fulfill the law.*

May God bring that blessed day to pass, in his own good time. Meanwhile, let us not say any thing that aggravates or irritates. Let us be bold. Let us be fearless. Let us stand for our own convictions. Let us receive men because they are men, and because they are Christ's. Let us work for universal Christianity, for true catholicity; and let us work in the spirit of love to God and to man. *Amen.*



PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

WE bless thee, O thou eternal God! lifted far above our comprehension. Thou hast stooped and enshrined the meaning of thyself in the word "Father," and so interpreted what thou art to us; but what thou art to be when we, growing through all thy discipline, shall come to be sons of God indeed, priests and kings—what fatherhood shall there be—we know not; yet full of blessedness it is. We know that then thy fatherhood shall lift us up even more wondrously than now, and that the blessings which we imagine we shall inherit, and that the joys which shine in us fragmentarily, shall lift themselves as mountains round about us forever. Eye hath not seen, nor even since the revelation of the Spirit, nor hath ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what things thou hast reserved for them that love thee; and toward all this precious heritage we are going day by day.

Why do we mourn, why do we bow down our heads as the willow, why are we filled with doubts and questions, since we know of immortality, and that our portion in Christ Jesus is sure? What matters it what befalls us here—whether we have our affections gratified, whether all the ways of life are sown with flowers, whether all things make music to our ears, or whether we are strangers and pilgrims girded about with sackcloth upon a weary way, since the way is sure, and the time can not be long, and thou art near and precious, and all that is innermost, and most essential to manhood, is fed by the way? By faith we take hold on the unseen; and we are ministered unto. Blessed art thou, O God! that, dost lend and send forth ministering angels by which we are protected and incited along our way. Blessed be thy Spirit that not once, but evermore, hath fallen upon us, and that hath made the pentecost universal and perpetual. Blessed art thou, O Lord! that dost love us, and that hast loved us, and that wilt love us to the end, and that, by the influences of nature and life, and by thy grace, and by thine own personal power and indwelling, wilt mould us until we are made perfect men in Christ Jesus.

Grant, we pray thee, that we may not be discouraged at the greatness of the way, nor at any part of our own experience. May we not be vanquished by temptations, and not be cast down, nor destroyed. Lift upon us the light of thy countenance, if we are in darkness. Give us renewed courage, if despondency hath taken hold of us. And we beseech of thee that if we have turned out of the way and wandered to our own harm, we may not be unwilling to turn back and retrace the same way, and feel again the piercing thorn, and again feel the flint.

We beseech thee that we may count ourselves worthy of eternal life. May we count all other things as of no value compared with the life that is to come. Here are we with diminished powers; here with but the beginnings of the knowledge of how to be joyful; here where joy is a stranger, or is fitful in all its work. O Lord! grant that we may not take these fragments, these gleams, and inherit them as our portion. May we look at the joys which thou didst behold when thou didst *endure the cross and despise the shame*; at those joys which stand eternally at the right hand of God. May we set our affections on things above, and not upon things on the earth. And so may we become ripened in the power of enjoying. So may we seek our life where it is, hidden with Christ in God. And though we lose these through many tears, through thorns, through troubles; though we are pursued on the right and on the left, may we still patiently hold on, and endure unto the end, that finally we may be raised, and come to all our manhood, and to all our power, and to all our glory in the heavenly estate.

And now, we beseech of thee that we may not seek these things selfishly, but by love. And may we rejoice in all those that are seeking them with us. May it be ours to count them dear to us as brethren and sisters; and may we seek to bear their burdens. May we cheer those that are pilgrims with us. And we beseech of thee that thou wilt teach thy whole church how to esteem, in the spirit of Christ, and in the love of Christ, all whose faces are set as though they were going to Jerusalem, as thine own brethren. May divisions cease. May all impracticable measures cease. May all things that are of the earth, and of man's devices, cease. May the divine Spirit be ministered to by all thy people, of every name, everywhere. May errors be brooded by love. May all the trouble which befalls men through human infirmities be taken out of the way, or be borne cheerfully, as the cross that is to be borne. Unite thy people, in confidence and in sympathy, one to another. Grant that the common works which engage all may be participated in by all universally. We beseech of thee that liberty may prevail in all thy churches, and that a deeper spirituality, a truer faith, a nobler love, a more unquenchable zeal and enterprise, may prevail in all the world. Hasten the day when persecution shall cease. Hasten the day when errors themselves shall perish. Hasten the glorious consummation, when Jesus shall come to reign in all the earth a thousand years. And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit. *Amen.*

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